

General Information for Study Guides

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Pilobolus: A Brief History

In 1970, several young men enrolled at Dartmouth College, took a dance class...to fulfill a physical education requirement. With interests as diverse as history, philosophy, and psychology, the idea of standing alone, in front of a class, and moving, was frightening. So they "clung to one another for both moral and physical support" building dances as a collective while at the same time creating something they thought was "cool".

Following graduation the "company without a name" headed to a member's dairy farm in Vermont where they continued their movement discoveries; creating choreography that relied on their collective creativity, humor, and interest in telling stories with their bodies. It was here that PILOBOLUS was born; and audiences loved this new kind of Modern Dance.

This collective creativity continues to this day. Dancers along with members of the Artistic Team and often artists from different genres, create dance collaboratively. Their physical inventions often appear to defy gravity or create new life forms right before your eyes.

As you watch our show, keep in mind how this company came to be. Watch for those moments of connectedness; when one or more bodies join together to support another while moving through space; when dancers appear to transform into something completely new. In those moments, you too will become connected...to PILOBOLUS.

What's in a Name?

Where did the name PILOBOLUS come from?



image of Pilobolus Crystallinus fungus

Fabulous Youtube of the (poo loving) fungus in action:

<https://youtu.be/T8OAmcUnm4g>

If you read the story about how PILOBOLUS came to be, you might recall the group of “dancers” from Dartmouth. One of those dancers had a father who was a biologist, studying Pilobolus the fungus in his lab. The first dance they made was inspired by the incredible physical nature of the fungus, a mushroom, found in barnyards and pastures. “It’s a feisty little thing—only $\frac{1}{4}$ inch tall, the length of your fingernail—and can throw its spores nearly 6 feet!”

The image of a spore shooting itself through the air was the perfect metaphor for the style dance they were creating, and hence, the perfect name for their new dance.

Later, when they started touring as a dance company, they needed a name for their company, they decided it was a perfect name for their dance company.

Pilobolus and Music

In Katherine Teck's "Ear Training for the Body," she addresses the connection between music and dance; it can help establish where you are, how to move, what the story or theme is, and even bring unity to the piece.

The work of PILOBOLUS is no different. More often than not, the company seldom completes a dance without the added element of music, or sound. Though there are occasions where the absence of sound or music helps tell a "different story."

The process of adding that aural element can happen in several ways: a work can be choreographed in the studio without music or sound; or, existing music (or pieces from a variety of compositions), that has the "feel" the choreographers need to express their idea, is used. Another way is when a composer observes and participates in the creation of the work as it develops. When this occurs, an original score evolves from the "back and forth" or "give and take" relationship between choreographers, musician(s), and dancers. This collaboration is yet one more example of how important the collaborative process is to PILOBOLUS.

As you watch, and listen to our show, consider how the music or sound, or perhaps its absence, connects to each piece. How important is the music or sound to the dancers' movement? Is it another part of the story or helping illuminate where the story takes place?

It's up to you to decide, because as the audience member, what you see and how it makes you feel, is an important part of experiencing dance, and the amazing PILOBOLUS.

Dance is Timeless

PILOBOLUS came to be in 1971. That's more than 50 years ago. That may seem like a very long time ago, but for dance, it's barely an eye-blink.

Just as in literature, take Shakespeare for example, where themes transcend centuries, the life of a piece of choreography continues to speak in a language that knows no time limit. So, let's take a look back at how dance evolved.

Centuries ago, in Europe, only the men danced, in fact, women weren't even allowed onstage; in early theater, women's roles were played by young boys or men. And just as today's dancers use movement to tell a story, those early dances would most likely be about myths or war.

Ballet, as we now know it, originated in the 1400s and was used as entertainment for Italian and French royalty. That is why all the names for the various ballet positions are in either French or Italian. In ballet, the body is held mostly upright, with the legs turned out from the hip.

In the early 1700s, dancing for both males and females became popular. Female dancers, or ballerinas, began wearing short skirts, or tutus, so that audience members could see their legs and appreciate and understand the new dance techniques being developed. During the 1800s, most ballets told a story from beginning to end; famous examples include the Christmas holiday ballet, The Nutcracker, or Swan Lake, which is based on a fairy tale.

Then in the 1900s, dance began to change. Dancers removed their shoes; they performed in clothes normally reserved for rehearsal; and the way in which their bodies moved, changed. Dancers felt free to show off their athleticism in new and different ways along with their individual personalities and range of emotions.

This was the beginning of modern dance. Certainly an interesting journey dating back centuries when only men danced, and fast forwarding to 1971 when four men came together, and in turn, PILOBOLUS was born.

THE PILOBOLUS DICTIONARY



Here are some words you might hear at the performance and those that are part of the company's toolbox when they make a dance:

Collaboration (noun): one of the foundations of the way in which Pilobolus works, by working together...in tightly knit groups/teamwork.

Improvisation (noun): often the manner in which Pilobolus creates a dance: by trying things out and/or inventing new movements; the art of creating something without advance preparation.

Partnering or Weight Sharing (verbs): in Pilobolus, the physical process of connecting one or more dancers together by taking and receiving weight. In doing this, new shapes are created which may or may not move as a single unit.

Pilobolize/Pilobolizing: (verb): to make something the way Pilobolus would.

Pilobolean (adj.): to act or be like a Pilobolus dancer/company member.

Piloboli (noun): more than one Pilobolus dancer/company member.